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Tory Island

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OCTOBER, 1963 *MAN* No. 192

STRUCTURE OF PERSONAL NAMES ON TORY ISLAND*

By J. R. Fox, London School of Economics and Political Science

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Tory Island

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551 **192** In *The Aran Islands*[1] Synge makes the following observations on the system of personal names then in use (1898–1902):

> When a child begins to wander about the island, the neighbours speak of it by its Christian name, followed by the Christian name of its father. If this is not enough to identify it, the father's epithet—whether it is a nickname or the name of his own father—is added.
>
> Sometimes when the father's name does not lend itself, the mother's Christian name is adopted as epithet for the children.
>
> Occasionally the surname is employed in its Irish form, but I have not heard them using the 'Mac' prefix when speaking Irish among themselves; perhaps the idea of a surname which it gives is too modern for them, perhaps they do use it at times that I have not noticed.
>
> Sometimes a man is named from the colour of his hair. There is thus a Seaghan Ruadh (Red John), and his children are 'Mourteen Seaghan Ruadh,' etc.
>
> The schoolmaster tells me that when he reads out the roll in the morning the children repeat the local name all together in a whisper after each official name and then the child answers. If he calls, for instance, 'Patrick O'Flaharty,' the children murmer, 'Patch Seaghan Dearg' or some such name, and the boy answers.
>
> If an islander's name alone is enough to distinguish him it is used by itself, and I know one man who is spoken of as Eamonn. There may be other Edmunds on the island, but if so they have probably good nicknames or epithets of their own.

[114 184] While on Tory Island (Oileán Thoraighe), Co. Donegal, in 1962, I collected the names of all living adults and found the system to be basically that reported by Synge for the Aran Islands, with enough distinctiveness to be worth a separate analysis.[2]

601 551 Kinship terms are rarely used among the islanders except between young children and their parents and parents' siblings. Cousinship is indicated by saying of a person something like 'his mother and my father were the children of two brothers' (*Bhí a mháthair agus m'athair clann na beirte dearbhráthar*), or 'we are children of brother and sister' (*Támuid clann dearbhráthar agus deirbhsheathar*). But in a small community where the genealogical links between persons are common knowledge, such descriptive explanations are rarely called for. Personal names are used 551 instead and in themselves help to indicate a person's position in the kinship structure by showing his line of descent for up to four generations.

A person will in fact have three sets of names: a Gaelic 'ceremonial' set; an English 'practical' set; and a Gaelic-English 'personal' set. A man's full Gaelic name will consist of his baptismal name followed perhaps by his 'epithet' such as Óg (young—usually means youngest of several brothers), Bán (fair), Mór (big), Beag (small—wee), [585] followed by his surname. Such a combination might yield, for example, 'Pádraig Óg Mac Ruadhraigh.' A woman, strictly speaking, retains her family name on marriage and adds the descriptive phrase 'wife of' (literally 'woman of')

* *With two tables*

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551 and the names of her husband, *e.g.* 'Máire Ní Dhubhghain
[585] bean Shéamuis Mhic Ruadhraigh'—literally, 'Mary, daughter of Doohan, wife of James the son of Rory.' A number of circumstances will determine whether or not her husband's name will 'stick' as a surname or whether she will go on being known by her maiden name. These names in their full forms are only used on ceremonial occasions such as dances—when a man or woman is called upon to sing or step-dance—, or for prayers in church during a serious illness, or for calling the roll in school, or for putting on a tombstone.

551 The practical names are the rough English equivalents
191 of the Gaelic names, used in dealing with English-speakers generally and particularly for use when working in England
167 and Scotland. The Government is usually dealt with in English for several reasons, mainly because although the
464 islanders all speak Gaelic as their native tongue, the language they read and write is English—a situation brought about by the pattern of migrant labouring which forced literacy on them when working in Britain. Also they find 'Dublin' or 'civil service' Irish difficult to follow. Most islanders, then, have an 'English' name. Our examples would be 'Paddy Rogers' and 'Mary Doohan' to the outside world. Sometimes these names stick and are used amongst the islanders rather like nicknames. Usually the English version is a rough phonetic equivalent of the Gaelic—Ó Duibhir becomes Diver, Ó Dubhgain becomes Doogan or Duggan, Mac Fhlaithbheartaigh becomes MacClafferty, etc. Sometimes this is abandoned and an English name taken for its 'likeness' to the Gaelic as with MacRuadhraigh and Rogers—Roger being the English name most like 'Rory.' The name Fíoruisce is sometimes hopefully rendered Whorriskey, but mostly this is not even tried and the simple 'Waters' is substituted. Those going to England for work are particularly inclined to pick an 'English' name, *i.e.* one the foreman will recognize.

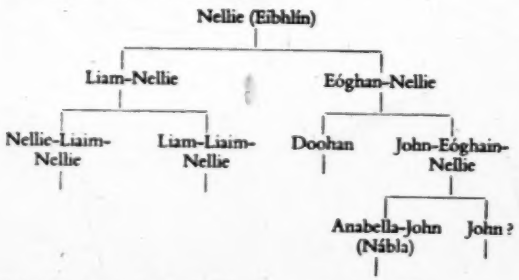
551 The third set of names, used for reference, consists of two or more Christian names, either Gaelic or English or both, 'strung' together in the manner described by Synge for Aran. Some people have as many as five or six names and 'epithets' strung together in this fashion. These names are the names of lineal ancestors either on the mother's or the father's side of the family. A person will take as many names as is necessary to distinguish him from all other persons, the surname system being inadequate for this task. (Four surnames cover 80 per cent. of the population.) He does not, however, pick these names arbitrarily but inherits the whole string. He can stop at any point in the string. Thus if a man was called 'Jimmy-Dhonnchadha-Mhuire-Mhicí,' his father must have been 'Donnchadh-Mhuire-Mhicí,' his paternal grandmother 'Máire-Mhicí' or maybe 'Máire-Mhicí-Tom.' Thus if our man wanted to add to his names, he would have to add 'Tom.' Usually one or at most two names are enough to distinguish a person, in

551 addition to his own. As Synge observes, if a man's name is unique in some way he may be known by it alone, although on Tory he will usually have a 'latent' string of names which he never actually uses but which could be used if his Christian name were to crop up again. If any of the ancestors in the 'string' had epithets (using this to mean descriptive terms), these are included. But there is a tendency to use only the epithet of the last person in the string. Sometimes, if an ancestor was firmly known by his surname (if, say, he was an immigrant and the first of his name on the island) then this is added also.[4] Below are some examples of these names:

Eóghan-John-Dooley-Mhalainne	Dooley was a man from Malin in Co. Donegal.
Mary-John-Dooley-Mhalainne	Eóghan's sister.
Kate-Dooley-Mhalainne	His paternal aunt.
Jimmy-Mhuire-Bhillí	Jimmy-Mary-Willy (Billy)
Peggy-Phaidí-Shéamuis-Dhomhnaill	Peggy-Paddy-Jimmy-Donal
Pádraig-Hughdie-Dhuibhir	Patrick Hugh Diver
Paddy-Johnnie-Fhlaithbheartaigh	Paddy John (Mac)-Clafferty[5]

An alternative type of name—and a man may have two or three alternative types—consists of the addition of the Christian name of a parent to the surname. Thus two paternal first cousins might be respectively 'Jimmy Diver Nancy' and 'Jimmy Diver Madge.'

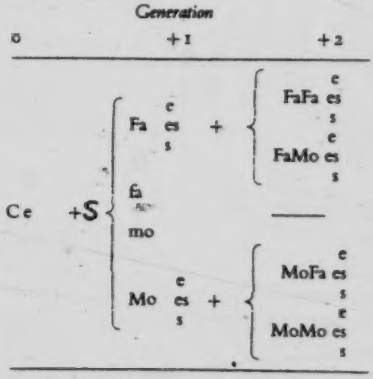
551 611 The segmentary process in the cognatic descent groups on the island affects this naming mechanism. This is illustrated in the following diagram:



This is an actual descent group tracing its ancestry to a widow, Nellie Doohan. The first four generations of the group are shown here, there being eight altogether. Nellie's descendants, 'Clann Nellie,' are divided into the Liam-Nellies and the Eóghan-Nellies. Clann Liaim-Nellie are subdivided into the Nellie-Liaim-Nellies and the Liam-Liaim-Nellies. The descendants of Eóghan-Nellie are segmented into the John-Eóghain-Nellies and another group known as the Doohans. There have only been sons in this latter group, and they have tended to be known by the 'John Doohan Nancy' type of name. The four or five generations below those shown on the diagram are not clearly segmented as yet. Amongst these, the name continuity is not so strong, but they all regard themselves as 'Liam-Nellies' or 'John-Eóghain-Nellies' or Doohans' according to the level of segmentation relevant to their various collective activities.[6] The degree to which the

551 611 name continuity of such a group can be maintained, converging on the founder's name as in our example, is some measure of the continuing solidarity of the group. This tends to weaken after about six generations and the disintegration of the group is reflected in the native commentary—*Tá na h-ainmneacha caillte*, 'the names is lost.' [182] The attempt to keep the name continuity often conflicts with the desire to distinguish person from person, hence the existence of alternative name types.

The following formula[1] shows the ideal structure of the Tory name using the following symbols: C = Christian name, S = surname, E = epithet, Fa = father's Christian name, Mo = mother's Christian name. A symbol in the lower case indicates that the item can be omitted from the progression of names.



The columns represent the alternative possibilities, the rows the matrilateral and patrilateral 'progression' of names. The formula can be expanded according to the same rules.

To see how this basic choice between matrilateral and patrilateral 'progressions' worked out in practice I tabulated instances of each type of name progression in my collection, distinguishing by sex of nominee (m and f) but ignoring the optional epithets and surnames (Table I). I collected these names separately from the two settlements on the island, East Town (*Baile Thoir*) and West Town (*Baile Thiar*), and they are so listed on the table. It is [184] commonly believed that the East is more traditional than the West, but this does not show up in any differences in the naming systems.

What emerges from this table is the overwhelming preference for taking the father's name (and his father's) by both men and women, and the fact that for both sexes one possible combination does not occur—m/f+ Mo+ MoMo. I am told that this has occurred in the past, but infrequently. The fourth cluster of name types in the table is a group of residual types. The oddities here are the girl who took her father's brother's name and the rest which skip a generation and start with the grandparental names. These cases usually result from an uncle or grandparents bringing up children in the absence of parents. If these relatives are seen as *in loco parentis* then the pattern remains the same as for the majority.

[1] [This formula has been corrected according to the specifications given in Man, vol. 63, article 248, p. 195, Dec. 1963. Analyst]

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TABLE I

Name type	West Town	East Town	Total
m + *Fa*	24	25	49
f + *Fa*	26	16	42
m + *Mo*	13	4	17
f + *Mo*	6	4	10
m + *Fa*+*FaFa*	15	5	20
f + *Fa*+*FaFa*	13	4	17
m + *Mo*+*MoMo*	0	0	0
f + *Mo*+*MoMo*	0	0	0
m + *Fa*+*FaMo*	0	3	3
f + *Fa*+*FaMo*	2	1	3
m + *Mo*+*MoFa*	0	3	3
f + *Mo*+*MoFa*	0	1	1
m + *MoMo*	2	1	3
m + *MoFa*	3	1	4
f + *MoFa*	1	0	1
f + *Fa*+*FaFa*+*FaFaFa*	3	0	3
f + *FaFa*+*FaFaFa*	0	1	1
f + *FaBro*	0	1	1
m + *MoMo*+*MoMoFa*+*MoMoFaMo*	3	0	3
f + *MoMo*+*MoMoFa*+*MoMoFaMo*	1	0	1
	112	70	182

Table II summarizes the 'laterality preference' as it affects men and women respectively.

TABLE II

	Patrilateral	*Matrilateral*	*Total*
m	72 (70·6 *per cent.*)	30 (29·4 *per cent.*)	102
f	67 (83·75 *per cent.*)	13 (16·25 *per cent.*)	80
Total	139 (76·4 *per cent.*)	43 (23·6 *per cent.*)	182

The figures in parenthesis are percentages of the row totals.

The overall preference is, as we have seen, patrilateral, but there is an interesting minority preference amongst males for matrilateral names. Practically a third of the men and less than a sixth of the women have matrilateral names.[7] There are several explanations for this trend amongst males. It may stem from the large number of widows with sons, or from the name continuity of the descent system. In a number of cases it follows from the fact that a man is given his father's Christian name as his own and hence takes his mother's name to distinguish him, although this is not all that common.

Such a highly personalized naming system only works within the particularistic boundaries of a small community.

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182 The world at large is not interested in the particular ante-
551 cedents of a man and the islanders recognize this in their
611 use of surnames with the outside world. The old 'family' or clan names placed a man in his wider kinship group in the days when this was important—it no longer matters today. Within the community the naming system described above distinguishes a man from other men and places him in his immediate kin group. It helps to establish his descent. Research in small communities in Western societies may reveal similar systems serving similar ends but based on different diacritical criteria.[8]

Notes

113 [1] J. M. Synge, *Four Plays and The Aran Islands*, Oxford, 1962, pp. 263f.

[2] Brief ethnographical details of Tory Island can be found in J. R. Fox, 'The Vanishing Gael,' *New Society*, Vol. I, No. 2, 1962.

551 [3] The second and subsequent names, when in Gaelic, are in the genitive. Some English names are Gaelicized and given a genitive form. I make no claims for the correctness of the spelling of the names given here (Irish spelling is pretty fluid), except that they are the forms recognized by literate islanders. I could not have made
[115] any headway with the Tory naming system and genealogies without the patient help of Máire Nic Fhlaithbheartaigh bean Aodha Uí Dhubhghain, Pádraig Óg Mac Ruadhraigh, and Aodh Ó Dubhghain.

[4] See Synge's comment on the use of the surname and the 'Mac' prefix. In the 'ceremonial' names on Tory both Mac and Ó are used, but when a surname is included in the 'personal' set, these prefixes are not usually used.

[5] This could be Paddy-John Uí Fhlaithbheartaigh—roughly Paddy John O'Flaherty. The pronunciation would be the same.

551 [6] A fuller analysis of the structure and functions of these descent
611 groups is in preparation. They seem to be mainly concerned with landholding—as a consequence of the equal division of land amongst all a man's (or woman's) heirs, and the system of keeping land in trust for migrants. Their other functions lie mainly in the sphere of mutual support amongst members in times of crisis.

[7] This distribution could only occur by chance in one sample out of 20: $\chi^2_{(1)} = 4{\cdot}30$: $p = < {\cdot}05$.

551 [8] The Welsh system of stringing ancestral names together with
171 'ap' is obviously similar to the Tory method, but the Welsh, I believe, used only male names. Mr. Andrew Dunsire tells me that in some Scottish coastal villages a man will be known by the boat he owns, his children inheriting this epithet. In some working-class communities which I know in England a system similar to that on Tory operates. A man may be known as 'Mary's Tom' and his son as 'Mary's Tom's Johnnie,' etc. Synge notes the use of occupations as marks of distinction in Wales and comments on the lack of occupational differentiation on the Aran Islands which makes this method impossible. In some rural communities a man is known by the name of his farm. W. M. Williams in *The Sociology of an English Village* (Routledge, 1956) gives examples of this. See also his fascinating discussion of Naming and Family Continuity, pp. 79–82 and 229f. The contrast with the Tory system is marked, however, in that one can, in Gosforth, move from 'side' to 'side' in choice of names—both surnames and Christian names being used.